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THE GREAT GRAY OWL IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

By W. J. AND ERMA FITZPATRICK

The late Charley Michael, of affectionate and respected memory to hundreds of nature lovers the world over, had few regrets. Among these would surely rank highly the fact that, despite a knowledge of the flora and fauna of the Yosemite region, unsurpassed by anyone before or since, he never succeeded in finding a Great Gray Owl, *Scotiaplex nebulosa nebulosa*. It was in 1930 that Mr. Michael took us under his ornithological wing as it were, and for the next twelve years until his death, it was our invaluable pleasure and privilege to take innumerable treks together in pursuit of the elusive and fascinating birds and plants of the park; but we never did see the "sixty-four dollar bird" of our area. On at least two occasions during these years the owl was reported as having been seen along the Glacier Point Road, but these observations we were unable to confirm, and, I suspect, had mental reservations concerning them.

The big moment finally arrived at twilight on the balmy afternoon of August 12, 1946, at which time we were disturbing the serenity of Perego Meadow on a gentian hunt. The bird flew up almost from our feet into a lodgepole pine and remained there at a height of not over twenty feet, while we studied it to our heart's content. From that time we were unable to locate the bird until the early summer of 1949, when a pair was reported in the Crane Flat area to the north of Yosemite Valley. During the whole summer of that memorable year we were successful in locating the birds on every occasion that we sought them, and had the real privilege of showing off our new friends to many of our older friends and acquaintances. Mr. Norman Jupe of Palm Springs took much footage of excellent motion picture film in color, of the pair seen at Crane Flat.

Early expeditions designed to find nests, or at least young, were made during the spring of 1950, but all that we got out of these expeditions were head colds, and all efforts to locate the owls at either Crane Flat or along the Glacier Point Road during the summer of 1950 resulted in failure.

However, a bird was finally seen near Badger Pass on October 15, 1950, and shortly afterward, on November 4, 1950, in company with our fellow members the Harry Adamsons and the Lee Stallcup, we had the extreme pleasure of locating three of the birds near the north end of Perego Meadow. Parenthetically, it might be added here that the bird seen near Badger Pass on October 15, remained perched in the same tree long enough for us to hurry to the ranger station at Badger Pass, call our friend, Mr. Ward B. Minturn of Fresno, and for him to dash all the way up from Fresno and add to his life list one of the most desired prizes obtained by him in over forty years of birding.

From the foregoing it will be noted that we have not really seen the Great Gray sufficiently to be able to claim that we have "studied" the bird, but a few general observations are permissible: In appearance the bird has what might be described as a benign manner. Certainly it has nothing of the look of implacable ferocity that we all know in the Horned Owl. Grinnell

and Storer, in their ANIMAL LIFE IN THE YOSEMITE, credit, as being probable a "deep reverberating whoo" to the bird. We are unable to confirm this earlier report, for the only sound that we have heard issue from the bird is a sort of "wroop", which seemed strangely weak and ineffectual for so imposing a creature otherwise. The bird is definitely diurnal, and has been seen to make many sallies out over open meadows in search of food. The active periods seem to occur chiefly during the early morning or late afternoon, the bird apparently having sense enough to stay put during the heat of the day. It will characteristically perch quite close to the ground in a lodgepole pine or a red fir along the edge of a meadow, where it can readily be observed, and it will on occasion permit approach to within a hundred feet, provided that no sudden or overt gestures are made. Once we had a bird sufficiently bemused to "wroop" back at us several times while we were quite close, and on several occasions we found the bird perched out in the open meadow on a fallen log.

On September 5, 1950, Mr. Robert Linford of Oakland, another member of our society, found a pair of the owls near Agnew Pass in the High Sierra, while on a hiking trip during the summer of 1950.

It would appear from these notes that the Great Gray Owl is at least holding its own in the Yosemite region. We are looking forward to more trips in search of nests and young, and further, hope to have the pleasure of introducing the bird to many more Auduboners in 1951.

January — LAKE MERRITT — Trip

About 30 members and guests met at Lake Merritt on January 27. The sky was overcast, the air, chilly. Mr. Covell, Oakland Park Naturalist, showed the group some caged waterfowl, among them a Ross goose, green-winged and cinnamon teal and female wood duck. The Ross goose had been injured at one time by a hunter, but had apparently fully recovered. A group of ten made the circuit of the lake on foot.

Forty-one species, exclusive of introduced birds, were observed:

Eared, pied-bl., and horned grebe; bk-cr. night heron; mallard, baldpate, pintail, canvasback, lesser scaup, Amer. goldeneye, bufflehead, ruddy and red-br. merganser; coot; glau-wg., west., herring, Calif., ring-bl., short-bl. and Bonaparte gull; Forster tern; Anna hummingbird; red-sh. flicker; downy woodpecker; scrub jay; pl. titmouse; bush-tit; robin; ruby-cr. kinglet; Audubon warbler; house sparrow; Brewer blackbird; purple finch; common goldfinch; spotted and br. towhee; Ore. junco; wh-cr., gl-cr. and song sparrow.

— L. R. LEINBACH, *Historian*

AUDUBON CAMP OF CALIFORNIA opens its first two weeks session June 17th. Any one of these five sessions is a thrilling experience and may add units to your professional standing. Write to Mrs. Ethel Richardson, 887 Indian Rock Ave., Berkeley 7, for particulars. Also those wishing to qualify for the scholarship which the Golden Gate Society gives.

NEW PUBLICATION: "Migration of Birds." Circular 16, (102 pp.) Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior. For sale by Supt. of Documents, Washington 25, D.C. price 30 cents.

February — MARIN PENINSULAS — Trip

On February 11, 35 birders met at the water-front in Sausalito, where a pelagic (Baird) cormorant in breeding plumage, and an arctic (Pacific) loon were seen. Next we stopped along Richardson Bay north of Sausalito where many water birds were seen, and here it began to rain. It continued for an hour or so while the group straggled over to Belvedere and Tiburon, where numerous water birds were seen during a lull, including a red-throated loon. Then it rained harder until about one o'clock, by which time the party was thoroughly scattered. A concentration of hundreds of pintails was seen along both sides of U.S. 101 in Corte Madera. After the rain stopped some returned via the ferry, while others went on to McNear's Beach and eventually to Vallejo. In the marsh near Napa Slough, two ravens and about 30 black-crowned night herons were seen, but not the usual white pelicans. Buffleheads were noted at many places in much greater numbers than in most years. At least 78 species were observed, as follows: arctic and red-th. loons; red-necked (Holboell) horned, eared, western and pied-b. grebes; br. pelican; double-cr., Brandt and pelagic cormorants; great blue and black-cr. night herons; Am. and snowy egrets; mallard, baldpate, pintail, green-w. teal, shoveller, canvasback, greater and lesser scaup, Am. golden-eye, bufflehead, surf scoter, ruddy duck, red-br. merganser; t. vulture; red-tailed, marsh and sparrow hawks; coot; killdeer; long-billed curlew; willet; spotted, least, red-backed and western sandpipers; marbled godwit; avocet; glaucous-winged, western, herring, Calif., ring-billed, short-billed and Bonaparte gulls; Anna hummingbird; kingfisher; flicker; black phoebe; scrub jay; raven; crow; chest-b. chickadee; bush-tit; wren-tit; Bewick and marsh wrens; robin; hermit thrush; west. bluebird; ruby-cr. kinglet; cedar wax-wing; shrike; Audubon warbler; meadowlark; redwing, Brewer blackbird; house finch; pine siskin; green-b. goldfinch; brown towhee; oregon junco; white-cr. and song sparrows.

— A. LAURENCE CURL, *Leader and Historian*

OBSERVATIONS . Edited by Mrs. Junea W. Kelly.

Lincoln Sparrow first seen Nov. 6, seen almost daily Dec. 1 to Jan. 18; Orange-crowned Warbler Jan. 7, 662 Santa Rosa Ave., Berkeley, Russell Pray. — Slate-colored Junco appeared again this year at 85 Menlo Place, Berkeley, Alison Berry. It was banded by Russell Pray Jan. 5. It is still present. — Slate-colored Junco Feb. 9-10-11, 124 Cambridge Way, Oakland, Mrs. Harold P. Henningsen. — White-throated Sparrow Dec. 2 and since, 5915 La Salle Ave., Oakland, Mrs. H. K. Trousdale. — Mockingbird Jan. 7, El Cerrito; Water Ouzel Jan. 28, Bear Creek Rd., Contra Costa Co., near Orinda, (at dam at first bridge), A. Laurence Curl. — Anna Hummingbird nest Jan. 31, Chain of Lakes, Golden Gate Park, Mrs. H. K. Trousdale. The editor has seen the bird on the nest, Feb. 3 and 10. — 300 Avocets in flooded field two miles north of Vallejo on Highway 29 to Napa, Jan. 21, E. A. Mayers. — 2 Holboell Grebes, Cliff House; Turkey Vulture, Chain of Lakes, Jan. 30; 3 American Mergansers (male), (Gallinule still present) St. Mary's Lake; Say Phoebe, St. Mary's, Feb. 13; Anthony Green Heron, Jan. 30-31, Feb. 3-10; 3 male and 1 female Wood Ducks, Feb. 3-10, (Gallinule still present) Chain of Lakes, Junea W. Kelly.

All reports of bird observatons should be mailed so as to reach 1311 Grand St., Alameda before the 18th of the month. J. W. K.

ASILOMAR CONVENTION

LET'S GO to this convention of California Audubonites and ENJOY the speakers, the films, the field trips, the scenery, the kindred spirits.

Mr. Baker, president of National Audubon Society, will bring new films of the Sanctuary birds that you are saving, and news of progress and plans for the future. Also other good speakers and much FUN! "A good time will be had by all". The date: March 17 to 20.

Write Mr. Ferdinand Ruth, 524 Las Juntas St., Martinez for particulars. Come to March Meeting for circulars.

LAUREL REYNOLDS, *President*

MARCH MEETING

The 402nd meeting of the Golden Gate Audubon Society will be held on March 8th in the Assembly Hall of the San Francisco Public Library, Civic Center, at 7:30 p.m. Following the business meeting, Mr. Russell H. Pray will show his colored motion picture "Some California Birds". The public is cordially invited. No-host dinner at the Whitcomb Hotel at 6 p.m.

MRS. FRANK A. SCOTT, *Program Chairman*.

CALAVERAS RESERVOIR TRIP

On Sunday, March 11. On this trip last year we saw yellow-billed magpies, rock wren, Lewis woodpeckers, wood ducks and a golden eagle. This year we will meet at the Water Temple at Sunol at 9:00 a.m. From Niles drive about 6 miles east, and at the cross-roads where route 21 comes in on the left, turn right. After birding at the Water Temple, we will drive south to the reservoir. It is a hike of about a mile to the tree where the Lewis woodpeckers are usually seen. For the more ambitious the hike will continue on around the reservoir and up the Arroyo Hondo. Leader, Harry Adamson. Bring lunch, binoculars, telescope and interested friends. Transportation by private car. Those persons needing rides can be helped only if those having room for extra passengers will call the Curls, LA. 6-7004.

GOLDEN GATE PARK TRIP

On Saturday, March 24. This is one of our old favorites. On this trip last year we saw a green heron, Florida gallinule, and wood duck. Meet at Hayes and Stanyan Streets in San Francisco at 9:00 a.m. Take No. 21 or 5 bus. We will probably visit the Chain-of-Lakes and the Cliff House. Leader, Mrs. Laura Stephens. Bring lunch if desired, binoculars, telescope and interested friends.

— A. LAURENCE CURL, *Chairman*,
Field Trips Committee.

Golden Gate Audubon Society

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

Branch of National Audubon Society

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